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Soviets Have Scrapped ABM Accord

A major intelligence breakthrough has enabled U.S. analysts to determine that the Soviets are constructing a huge antiballistic-missile system, which would completely upset the delicate balance of nuclear terror between the two superpowers.

The new revelations make it clear that, for the Soviets, the 1972 ABM treaty is dead. They've spent too much time and money constructing the secret ABM network to pull back for a treaty they have already violated.

The U.S.-Soviet restrictions on weapons that can shoot down incoming missiles were designed to maintain "mutual assured destruction" as a deterrence against either side attempting a nuclear first strike. The Soviets' near-hysterical opposition to President Reagan's so-called "Star Wars" program, which would enable the United States to shoot down incoming missiles in space, is based on fear that such a system would allow us to launch a nuclear strike without fear of an overwhelming Soviet response.

Yet now the United States finds itself facing a gigantic Soviet ABM defense in a few years—before Star Wars is off the drawing board. Politically, this could be a devastating embarrassment for the Reagan administration, as a high-level White House source admitted.

The ABM disclosure "has us very worried," the official said. "Despite our own defense buildup, this means we may be far more vulnerable now than what we said the nation was under Jimmy Carter. And it's happened on our watch."

What was the intelligence information that has set off such a tizzy? The identification of hundreds of previously undisclosed sites where the Soviets are constructing—or have completed—ABM facilities. The disclosure comes in the recent, top-secret "National Intelligence Estimates" of Soviet strength—a document representing the distilled wisdom of all U.S. military and civilian intelligence agencies.

A source said this series of NIEs was delayed for years because of "the interminable wrangling over the nature of Soviet strategic forces." The CIA invariably argued that Soviet strategic weapons were defensive, designed to launch a retaliatory blow at U.S. population centers after an American first strike. But that changed in 1980, the source explained, when all the agencies agreed that the Soviets were building an offensive strategic force, which could take out most U.S. missile systems in a pre-emptive attack.

A recent intelligence breakthrough confirms this appraisal of Soviet intentions. For obvious reasons, we won't go into details of the breakthrough, lest the Soviets be able to piece together what happened and take corrective action.

Suffice it to say that some unsung genius in the U.S. intelligence community discovered a "key" that unlocked the mysteries of the enormous amount of raw, hitherto indecipherable information on the Soviets gathered from various sources. Analysts were then able to pinpoint hundreds more military sites than before—particularly the previously unknown ABM locations.